
On the authorship of Linnaea and the etymology of Moraea

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The illustration on the cover was taken from the sixth edition of Linnaeus' *Genera Plantarum* (1764).

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Introduction

While working with the generic names to be included in *Plant genera named after people (1753-1853)*, two appellatives related with Linnaeus caught my attention and curiosity: 1. *Linnaea*- because its authorship seemed to be unclear, and 2. *Moraea*- because it has been stated that Linnaeus dedicated it to his wife and/or his father-in-law, a practice at the time unheard off. The purpose of this contribution is to explore the history of both names with the hope of clarifying as far as possible both situations.



Linnaea

A search for *Linnaea* in the Tropicos database reveals the name credited to Linnaeus 1753 (Species Plantarum vol. 2, p. 653). The same search in the IPNI (International Plant Names Index) database reveals the name credited to Gronovius (with the same bibliographic citation). In his 2013 systematic treatment of the genus, Christenhusz credits the name to Gronovius ex Linnaeus (also with the same citation). Statements about *Linnaea*'s authorship range in certainty from "It was Gronovius who had the honour of naming *Linnaea* after his illustrious friend" (Smith 1798: 112) to "Named for and by Carl Linnaeus..." (Stearn 1992: 191). The latter citation is particularly important because William T. Stearn (1911-2001) was at the time considered the main authority on Linnaeus. Why did Stearn write with such conviction that Linnaeus named the genus after himself?

Very likely because he knew that the first mention of *Linnaea* predates by three years the moment when Gronovius and Linnaeus met and became aware of each other's work. The generic name first appears in the diary of Linnaeus' expedition to Lapland, which started on May 12, 1732 and lasted five months. It is found on page 99 of James Edward Smith's *Lachesis Lapponica, or a Tour in Lapland* (1811), a translation and first publication of Linnaeus' diary. The name was used by Linnaeus on May 29 and carries a footnote by Smith which reads "The name occurs here for the first time in the manuscript." On May 14 and May 17, Linnaeus referred to the species by its older name *Campanula serpyllifolia*. Thus, it was sometime between May 17 and May 29, 1732 that Linnaeus decided to name the plant after himself.

Linnaeus' diary was found by Smith among the many documents included in the Linnean collection, which he purchased from Linnaeus' widow following the death of Carl Linné the Younger in 1783. Like most diaries, it was a text written by the author for himself and not meant to be published (otherwise Linnaeus, who was so fond of publishing, would have published it himself); on this point Smith writes (page xi) "It is, in short, such a journal as a man would write for his own use, without the slightest thought of its ever being seen by any other person", and on the next page, "As not a word throughout the whole was written for the use of any person but the author...".

Smith, cited by Emerson (1846: 354) summarizes the history of *Linnaea* as follows: "Linnaea," says Sir James Edward Smith, "is so called in honor of the great naturalist, Linnaeus; and appears by the journal of his tour to Lapland, **to have been chosen by himself to commemorate his own name**, when he gathered it at Lyksee, May 29, 1732. Former botanists had called this elegant and singular little plant *Campanula serpyllifolia*; but Linnaeus, prosecuting the study of vegetables on the only certain principles, the structure of the parts of fructification, soon found this to constitute a new genus. **He reserved the idea in his own mind till his discoveries and publications had entitled him to botanical commemoration**; and his friend Gronovius, in due time, undertook to make this genus known to the world." I have added bold for emphasis.

How exactly Jan Frederik Gronovius (1686-1762) became associated *Linnaea* is unknown, but a possible scenario is suggested in the next page. The two men met soon after Linnaeus arrived in Holland in 1735 for what turned out to be a three-year stay, with brief visits to England, France and Germany. Linnaeus arrived in Holland with several manuscripts and after showing Gronovius the one for *Systema Naturae*, the latter was so impressed that later in the same year he and Scottish physician Isaac Lawson (then a student in Holland) published the work at their own expense. Gronovius soon became one of Linnaeus' main patrons, admirers, and his closest friend in Europe, according to Smith (1798: 112) on par with Linnaeus' great friend Peter Artedi. Linnaeus in turn helped Gronovius with the study of the plants for the latter's *Flora Virginica* (1739, 1742), which is probably the

first publication by another author following Linnaeus' system of classification. *Linnaea* does not appear in *Flora Virginica* nor in any other of Gronovius' publications.

Linnaea first appears in print on the legend for plate 12 of Linnaeus' *Flora Lapponica* (1737), where it is followed by Gronovii. In the text (p. 206) the plant is called PLANTA (in

4. LINNÆA floribus geminatis. Gronovii.
§. 250. p. 206.

250. PLANTA nostra Tabula XII. figura 4.
Campanula serpillifolia. Bauh. pin. 93. prod. 35.
Scheuch. alp. 131. Tournef. inst. 112. Rudb. lap.
96. f. 1.

Num-

upper case, like for the other genera) followed by *nostra*: *planta nostra*, our plant, my plant.

The name appears next in Linnaeus' *Genera Plantarum* (1737: 188), followed by *Authore Clariss. Dn. Gronovio*. It appears also in *Hortus Cliffortianus* (1737: 320), credited to Gronovius and with a reference to the already mentioned table in *Flora Lapponica*. *Linnaea* appears again in *Critica Botanica* (1737: 80), credited also to Gronovius and followed by the now famous phrase *plantam Lapponicam, depressam, vilem, neglectam. brevi tempore florulentum, a consimili suo Linnaeo*; translated by Stearn (1992: 191) as “a plant of Lapland, lowly, insignificant, disregarded, flowering but for a brief space- from Linnaeus who resembles it.”

How then did Gronovius become the author of *Linnaea*, a name he never published? I can imagine a conversation between two close friends, with Linnaeus mentioning that since first encountering the twin flower in Lapland he had in mind the possibility of it being named for him, but that doing so himself would be unacceptable, since no other botanist had ever done this. Gronovius perhaps listened, smiled and happily offered to receive the credit for the name, and to him it was credited by Linnaeus. The meeting, if it ever took place, probably occurred sometime before *Flora Lapponica* went to the printer in 1736.

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Moraea

Moraea (originally *Morea*) was erected by Miller (1758: 159), who wrote: “I have taken the liberty of constituting this genus of plants, and applying of this title to it, in honour of Robert More, esquire, of Shropshire, who is a very learned gentleman, and well acquainted with most branches of natural history, particularly with botany.” According to Wikipedia, “Robert More (1703-1780), of Linley Hall, near Bishop's Castle, Shropshire. was an English academic and politician who sat in the House of Commons between 1727 and 1761. He was also a noted amateur botanist”. More was member of the Royal Society. Citing the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Wikipedia adds that More was a friend of Linnaeus. There’s no correspondence between both men in the Linnaean Collection, but they may have met in 1736 during Linnaeus’ visit to London. How Miller’s unequivocal dedication became connected with Linnaeus’ family is explained in the following lines.

Morea was included by Linnaeus in the 6th edition of *Genera Plantarum* (1764: 27) with the spelling changed to

A rectangular box containing a handwritten entry from a botanical dictionary. The text is written in dark ink on a light-colored background. It reads "60. MORÆA. Mill. dict. ✱". The "60." is at the beginning, followed by "MORÆA." in all caps, then "Mill. dict." in a smaller script, and finally a small star symbol "✱" at the end.

Moraea (e changed to æ, today usually written ae). Lawrence (1955: 130) states “No reason was given by Linnaeus for this unjustifiable change in spelling.” Brown (1928), cited by Lawrence (loc. cit.) writes “It is probable that the similarity of the name *Morea* to his wife’s maiden name *Moræus* led to his misspelling it.” Lawrence then adds “The Linnaean spelling has since been conserved and *Moraea* by legislation has thus been decreed as correct.” I suspect that Linnaeus was simply latinizing the name, giving it what he considered to be the proper spelling, just as he had spelled *Linnaea* instead of *Linnea*.

The etymological confusion began in 1787, when in a dissertation defended by Zacharias Colliander, Carl Peter Thunberg (1743-1828) wrote, apparently misguided by the spelling *Moraea*, that the name had been dedicated to Johan Moraeus, celebrated and highly experienced physician at Falun. Wittstein (1852: 592) contributed to the confusion by crediting *Moraea* to Linnaeus and stating that it was dedicated to Johan Moraeus, while including Robert More as a secondary name.

The connection of *Moraea* with Linnaeus' wife can be found in Peattie (1936: 116), who in a list of genera dedicated by Linnaeus to people states “*Moraea*, a genus of exquisite flowers from the Cape, akin to iris, was dedicated to his sweetheart.” It can also be found in Jackson (1990: 24): “Linnaeus married Sara Elisabeth Moraea; her father was Dr. Johan Moraeus, the town physician of Falun. The name “Morea” was originally given by Philip Miller after “Robert More of Shropshire” but was taken over by Linnaeus and changed to *Moraea*.” Probably influenced by the latter source, Clarke and Charters (2016: 226) state that *Moraea* was named for Linnaeus's wife, although they also write that *Morea* was dedicated to Robert More.

How likely it was for a botanist in Linnaeus' time to dedicate a generic name to his wife or to another family member? A search for wife in my Plant genera named after people (1753-1853) reveals five such names: *Agathaea* and *Riencourtia*, dedicated in 1816 and 1818 by Alexandre Henri Gabriel de Cassini to his wife Cathérine Elisabeth Agathe de Riencourt; *Klugia*, dedicated in 1833 by Diederich Franz Leonhard von Schlechtendal to his wife Ida Amalie Henriette Schlechtendal, née Klug; *Tersonia*, dedicated in 1849 by Christian Horace Bénédict Alfred Moquin-Tandon to his wife Joséphine Louise Moquin-Tandon, née de Terson; and *Theresia*, dedicated in 1849 by Karl Heinrich Emil Koch to his wife Therese Koch, née Weichardt. Note that all these dedications date from the 19th century, none are known from the 18th century. Similar results are obtained when searching for other family members.

In closing, I don't believe that Linnaeus changed *Morea* to *Moraea* in order to either appropriate the name nor to rededicate it to his father-in-law or to his wife, specially when he knew that the name had been dedicated to another person,

someone knowledgeable of botany whom he may have met personally. In his *Critica Botanica* (1737), Linnaeus specifically argues against such names, when he writes (translation by Hort 1938: 54): “Anyway, I am astounded when I see with what boldness, with what rashness Petiver, to say nothing of others, thrust priceless gifts” (referring to generic names) “too brilliant and valuable for the uneducated, on florists, monks, **relations** (his word is *affinibus*), friends and the like. Gifts thus given are no gifts, but only a source of derision and scandal to posterity.” I have added bold for emphasis.

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